



## An Unknown Whitman Prose Manuscript on the Principle of Aggregation

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## NOTES

### AN UNKNOWN WHITMAN PROSE MANUSCRIPT ON THE PRINCIPLE OF AGGREGATION

Twenty years after the onset of the Civil War, and a decade after his publication of "Democratic Vistas," Whitman remained haunted by the issues that had divided the nation. What was the right balance between pride and sympathy, the individual and the en-masse, states rights and national union? "Within the last twenty years," a manuscript recently acquired by the University of Virginia's Department of Special Collections, and reproduced on the back cover of this issue, reveals Whitman wrestling with these problems:

Within the last twenty  
years, (and to-day, 1880-'81, stronger than ever,)  
it is ~~as~~<sup>as</sup> clear to me as any thing can be  
that the segregation-parts of our Republican  
institutions—~~all that is~~<sup>those</sup> involved, <sup>for instance</sup> in the swing,  
power, "rights," of ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> States, municipalities, and  
of individual citizens—are provided for immutably,  
~~and~~ radiate themselves to the full, ~~or~~ perhaps to  
excess <sup>—and always will.</sup> What most ~~needs~~<sup>wants demands</sup> strengthening to-day, is  
the principle of <sup>coherence</sup> aggregation—~~needs~~<sup>wants demands</sup> it in the  
very interest of <sup>segregation</sup> individu[a]lity. There can be  
no free identities of States or individual  
citizens without a strong and definite Central  
Identity to all. ~~We first require that~~<sup>1</sup>

As Whitman ponders the relationship between individuality and community, the urgency of his concern is visible in his revisions (he twice moves from "needs" to "wants" to "demands") and in the tortured nature of his syntax. This topic—both when treated here and in "Democratic Vistas"—sets Whitman into syntactical spasms presumably because of his fear that the United States lacked what he called in "Democratic Vistas" a "skeleton" knitting all together. The worry that the United States lacked a unifying coherence, a Central Identity, that it seemed shapeless, atomistic, and tending to diffusion, leads him in this manuscript to produce a jaw-breaking, grammar-wrenching doubling of key oppositional terms—"coherence aggregation" versus "segregation individuality"—that he ultimately argues are not oppositional after all.

Whitman had worried about similar issues and had used similar language in 1876 in a piece appearing in *Two Rivulets*, "Nationality—(And Yet)": "It is more and more clear to me that the main sustenance for highest separate Personality, These States, is to come from that general sustenance of the aggregate, (as air, earth, rains, give sustenance to a tree,)—and that such Personality, by Democratic standards, will only be fully coherent, grand and free, through the cohesion, grandeur and freedom of the common aggregate, the Union."<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the marked difference in tone results from distinct perspectives: the more hopeful assessment takes a future-oriented view; the

more somber assessment views the present and immediate past.

What concerned Whitman in the postbellum years was a fundamental problem in U.S. culture: how can we foster a deep sense of community within an individualistic democracy, how nurture moral and affective ties between citizens and the state?

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## NOTES

1 Reproduced with permission from Walt Whitman Collection (#3829-Y), Clifton Waller Barrett Library, The Albert H. Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia Library.

2 Whitman, *Two Rivulets* (Author's Edition: Camden, NJ, 1876), 23. This passage can also be found in *Prose Works 1892*, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 2:512.

## REDISCOVERED NINETEENTH-CENTURY WHITMAN ARTICLES

The following items reprinted from late nineteenth-century newspapers fill a couple of niches in Whitman scholarship. In the first, the Washington correspondent of the *Springfield Republican* comments on Whitman's admiration for Emanuel Leutze's mural "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way," which has hung in the rotunda of the U. S. Capitol since 1861. The second item establishes the exact date and text of Richard Maurice Bucke's report of Whitman's lecture on Lincoln in Philadelphia in April 1880. The third item is a substantial 1886 interview with Whitman. Finally, I append a note on an early printing of excerpts from the 1893 *In Re Walt Whitman*.

1. E. K., "Surface Life at Washington," *Springfield Republican*, February 16, 1869, 2:5; excerpted in *New York Evening Post*, February 17, 1869, 1:2.

Walt Whitman wanders up and down the avenue daily—and he and Beau Hickman seem the only blots on the landscape. Whitman never carried his eccentricities of appearance to greater lengths than now. I met him yesterday, standing in front of Leutze's picture, 'Westward the Star of Empire takes its way,' and leaning royally against one of the pillars, talking down to a group of effete little women who were perhaps deifying him. His hair, which the old poet gives free scope, falls below his shoulders, and his head is crowned by an immense, weather-stained hat, broad-brimmed as a Quaker's, and 'skewed' all out of shape. His overcoat is rowdy, his gloves are unbuttoned; his aspect is as distract as a lover's. What a splendid waste of raw material! How much more the poet and the man he would look in a decent coat and a pair of cotton gloves! He said he had been ill, but was now engaged in writing something describing 'the merging of all things in nature into each other'—something like Carlyle's chapter called 'Epimenides'<sup>1</sup>—perhaps. The ladies looked wondrously amazed, and Walt, taking up a little child near by, held it up to explain to it Leutze's masterpiece—kissing it tenderly as a woman between his long, ambling, loose-jointed, descriptive sentences.